

# It's All About



# Families

**Family Centered Education in WIC**

**Pilot Project Summer 2002**

**Final Report**

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## I. Executive Summary

### **WIC is all about families, health and education.**

The California WIC Program's exploration of family-centered education (FCE) draws these three concepts together. FCE is a learner-centered approach to the group education session in WIC. It brings children and parents together in an interactive session with a WIC educator, where parents share their experiences, children enjoy hands-on learning, and WIC staff act as knowledgeable facilitators for the happy commotion. We can see in Family Centered Education class sessions clear examples of Jane Vella's "learning buzz."<sup>1</sup>



**"Thank you to the State for thinking  
about the entire family in a program  
that's for women, infants and children."**

*Comment from a WIC parent*

### **Goals**

The California FCE Pilot Project (2001-2002) was guided by the following goals for parents, children and staff:

#### ***Parents will:***

- have a positive experience while they increase knowledge and enhance skills in the area of child and family nutrition.

#### ***Children will:***

- become more interested in nutrition and physical activity, through enjoyable activities that also help them develop kindergarten-readiness skills.

#### ***Staff will:***

- enhance their skills in group education, including learning how to creatively engage children and parents together.

### **The Process**

California WIC developed and tested three lesson plans for FCE group education:

- ***Grow Your Own Garden***
- ***Grocery Shopping with Families***
- ***Five A Day***

Eighteen local agencies participated in the pilot test of the FCE approach, conducting over 200 class sessions and gathering feedback from over 1440 participants and 50 staff members.

### **Outcomes**

Our experience over the past two years demonstrates the value of the FCE approach.

- **Parents** gave wholehearted approval to the classes. They told us that the sessions were a welcome change from the usual WIC classes. 85% of the participants rated their class as "very useful" and over 95% of them stated that they would come to an FCE class again, and would recommend it to other families.

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<sup>1</sup> Jane Vella is a leading proponent of learner-centered education, an internationally recognized educator and author, and founder of Global Learning Partners.

- **Children** put their hands in the mystery boxes, helped to place fruits and vegetables on the plates indicating the meal during which that food item might be served, talked about items in the shopping-survival purse, and planted seeds in containers. They happily received stickers to take home and paste on their *Five A Day* handouts. When asked, after class, if they had enjoyed themselves, they responded "Yes!"
- **WIC staff** were enthusiastic about this approach to group education, with 80% of them believing that this approach is valuable and workable in their local agency. Many told us that they have been frustrated by their previous experiences with group education, and want to expand and adapt FCE to other classes in their agencies. They appreciated the training they received to build their skills in group education.

### Next Steps

**Learn more about WIC Families.** The FCE approach is clearly valued as a way to teach nutrition and health topics. For children, good health is a foundation upon which their success in school and life rests. How can the WIC program help parents and children to be healthy learners? This pilot experience explored families' perspectives on their children's learning. We questioned participants about their needs for further information on parenting and health. We gathered a bit of information, but there is a great deal more to learn.

**"You can take your kids shopping with you so they can learn."**

**Make room for FCE in WIC.** The primary WIC benefit has long been perceived – by both WIC staff and WIC families – to be the voucher for food supplies. Education is also valued, but not at the same level. FCE was certainly valued, but it takes time and effort to present classes using the interactive style and hands-on activities included in the FCE approach.

- Staff need training in learner-centered and family-centered educational techniques.
- There must be comfortable space for classes that welcome children and adults.
- FCE classes take a bit more time than the 15-minutes allotted for group education in many agencies.
- The classes work best with mixed groups – parents with their children of preschool age. This requires scheduling WIC participants into specific time slots, not encouraging the walk-in approach.

**Build a community of FCE practitioners.** This is a fairly new approach to WIC group education. Therefore, those who are the innovators need the support of their peers in order to take risks, put in extra time, and cope with the different challenges of teaching to adults and children together. They will be helped by associates in WIC and in community agencies with similar missions related to family health.

The goals of family-centered education were achieved during the Summer 2002 pilot test. An ongoing commitment to family-centered education, and an expansion of the concepts and practices to all 83 California WIC agencies, will benefit families, children and staff throughout the state.

**"Starting a garden with my child can be fun and not work. Reading and listening to music are ways of learning for my child, as well as for myself."**

## ***II. Background on WIC FCE: 2000 – 2002***

### **A. Goals and Concepts**

The national Women Infants and Children Supplemental Food Program (WIC ) has the goal of improving nutritional status and health in women and their children from birth to age five. WIC provides the following three major services:

- Food Instruments for supplemental food
- Nutrition education and breastfeeding promotion
- Referrals to health and social service providers in the community

The WIC program is much appreciated by the participants it serves, and WIC families' health status has been shown to be better than the health status of other low- income families.

The California WIC program currently serves about 1.3 million participants per year. CA WIC works continuously to improve quality in all three service areas. The staff of WIC agencies must work creatively to meet the needs of California's diverse population.

In 2000, the California WIC program underwent a statewide strategic audit to look at local agency capacity building for all levels of staff. This audit, and the subsequent strategic planning process, motivated WIC to implement efforts that will improve the quality of the education that WIC staff offer to participants. WIC has supported initiatives for paraprofessional training and certification, adult learning, facilitated group discussion and learner-centered education.

The California WIC Training Manual defines learner-centered education as "a focus on learning that allows for a range of approaches and involves the learner as an active participant in the learning process." This type of education is quite different from didactic education, during which the participant is given information by the instructor. Lectures are a quicker and simpler educational technique, yet there is clear evidence that better learning takes place when teacher and learner engage interactively.<sup>2</sup> Interactive education is better for children as well as for adults.

**Family centered education (FCE)** is a special form of interactive education that involves parents and children together. By engaging the whole family, WIC is able to maximize the effectiveness of its nutrition education efforts. Children and parents together can receive nutrition information from the WIC staff person, while parents can share experiences and insights with each other. Children can build numeracy, literacy and social skills in the context of the nutrition lesson.

National data show that lower-income families do not read as often to their children as higher-income families. The lower income families have fewer children's books at home. The California WIC program has discovered that a large number of participating families do not regularly read to their children, nor engage in other activities that might increase their children's chances of success in school. WIC children may be entering kindergarten less ready to learn than their peers. Because WIC has an ongoing relationship with families throughout the early childhood years, the WIC setting is ideal for providing education that goes beyond nutritional concepts.

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<sup>2</sup> For example: Jane K. Vella, *Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach: The Power of Dialogue in Educating Adults*. Jossey-Bass, 2002 (revised). David A. Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*. Prentice Hall PTR, 1983.

### **The FCE Proposition**

WIC FCE has the potential to improve the way that the required nutrition education contact is provided to WIC participants. By engaging the parents and children together, a group education session becomes more fun. People like to talk about food and eating, especially when they are not feeling nervous about being told to "eat better." As a bonus, it is easy to incorporate social, literacy and numeracy skills into WIC nutrition education. For example, social skills are being built when a group looks at the variety of ways that a family might negotiate a shopping trip. Families count and read while in the grocery store. Preschool children learn from hands-on activities, so any activity that allows them to participate – in packing a bag to go to the store, in feeling the texture of an apple or a kiwi fruit, in categorizing the items needed to bake a pie or toss a salad – builds skills that will be useful to them as they start school. But WIC FCE is not only about children. Parents that engage in these interactive lessons will learn more for themselves, too.

Our hypothesis – or proposition – is that the WIC FCE approach will prove beneficial to parents, children and WIC staff.

**The Goals of WIC Family Centered Education** are designed to achieve benefits for three groups:

#### ***Parents will:***

- increase knowledge and enhance skills in the area of child and family nutrition.
- have a positive experience of learning with their children, that enhances bonding and relieves them of the worry of watching their children while they attend to an adult lesson.
- learn from the modeling of the educator: how parents can be their children's first teachers and enhance school readiness.

#### ***Children will:***

- experience family-based nutrition education activities in a positive atmosphere.
- develop skills that will make them more ready for kindergarten.
- become more interested in nutrition and physical activity.

#### ***Staff will:***

- enhance their repertoire of types of group education presentations.
- learn ways of coping with challenging situations raised by children in classes.



## Elements of FCE Lesson Plans

Each lesson plan includes specific and consistent elements to achieve the goals listed above.

- *Music* is played at the beginning of every lesson, as a means of gathering the group. It is upbeat and cheerful, signaling that this lesson will be fun. The use of music also recognizes the variety of learning styles that are present in any group – musical learning is one style.
- *Introduction is the first part.* By inviting the group to share their names (adults and children), the educator sets up an atmosphere that invites contribution from all.
- *The Warm Up Activity* is brief, and builds upon the introductions by inviting all participants to contribute some thoughts on the topic of the day.
- *In the Book Sharing* portion of each lesson, we read a book to families as a way to engage the children. We also model reading to children for the parents, encouraging them to continue this activity with their children at home.
- *The Family Discussion* involves parents and children together. The teaching is family-centered, oriented not just toward adults (excluding children) or toward children (excluding adults). As interactivity is a hallmark of FCE, the use of a discussion format – rather than lecture – especially conveys to adults that their thoughts matter.
- *The Hands-On Activity* is essential for the involvement of preschool-aged children. This age group is very tactile, and their interest will not be held by abstract ideas.
- *The Take-Home Activities* are intended to carry the lesson beyond the 30 minute experience of one day. This activity encourages parents and children to continue the learning in their own homes.

## B. Local Agency Involvement in Field Test and Pilot

The California WIC Branch (state agency) began working to bring FCE to the state in late 2000. First, the Branch gathered an advisory committee made up of local agency staff. Members of the committee shared and discussed a variety of local efforts that were directed toward children. In 2001, James Bowman Associates (JBA) joined the group as a contractor. JBA collected child-oriented lesson plans that were available from California agencies and from other states, and helped the advisory committee to choose three topics to field test. The advisory committee prioritized the present elements that should be in a family-centered lesson, and JBA revised the currently available lesson plans to include those elements. The three topics are:

- *Grow Your Own Garden*
- *Five A Day*
- *Grocery Shopping with Families*



### **Needs Assessment**

Before giving the lesson plans to agencies to field test, we conducted a needs assessment of WIC staff people. We asked for their opinions about group education in WIC, about children in WIC classes, and whether they thought that an approach that included parents and children together would work. Overwhelmingly, staff members thought that the FCE approach was worth trying. They told us that it was frustrating to have children coming to WIC appointments yet to not address the children's needs or interests. Staff seem to genuinely like children, and want to meet the needs of WIC families. Staff members were mostly confident that they could revise their approach to teaching, and use a less structured, less didactic style. They were willing to try different teaching techniques, although not sure that they would have all the skills that they needed. They were concerned also about how a different, more interactive type of lesson would be carried out within the time and scheduling constraints of the WIC program. And some wanted to be sure that any extra goals of teaching – for example building literacy, numeracy, social skills – not take away from WIC's mission of nutrition education.

### **Field Test**

Five agencies received an inservice that prepared them to field test one of the three lesson plans. Based on the agencies' feedback, those lesson plans were revised for statewide pilot use by the end of 2001. The field test agencies were:

- Public Health Foundation Enterprises
- NorthEast Valley Health Corporation
- United Health Centers of the San Joaquin Valley
- Monterey County
- Sacramento County

### **Pilot Test**

Two of these agencies, Public Health Foundation Enterprises and United Health Centers of the San Joaquin Valley, also participated in the pilot phase of the project. The additional pilot agencies were:

- Alliance Medical Center, Healdsburg
- American Red Cross, San Diego
- Community Resource Project, Sacramento
- Placer County, Auburn
- Planned Parenthood, Santa Ana
- Harbor-UCLA Research and Education Institute, Inglewood
- Riverside County, Riverside
- San Diego State University, San Diego
- San Mateo County, San Mateo
- Solano County, Vallejo
- Scripps Health Mercy Hospital, San Diego
- Sonoma County, Santa Rosa
- St. Elizabeth, Red Bluff
- Stanislaus County, Modesto
- Watts Health Foundation, Los Angeles
- Yolo County, Woodland

### **C. FCE Training Conference – Preparation for the Pilot**

The eighteen agencies began the pilot process by sending staff to a training conference in June 2002. The conference design was based on the information that was gained from the field test phase of the project. We identified the skills and knowledge that staff needed in order to teach FCE lessons well. In addition to building individual skills and knowledge, we attended to the need to build a community of FCE practitioners among the agencies involved in the pilot project. We believed that agencies could benefit from interaction with and support from others who were also engaged in piloting. The **conference goals** addressed these identified needs:

#### ***1. Apply early childhood development and school readiness principles to WIC family centered education***

- Describe the goals and benefits of using a family centered approach for WIC group education
- Determine which types of nutrition education activities are adult-centered, child-centered or family-centered
- Describe how general principles of early childhood development apply to WIC nutrition education
- Identify the contribution of various parts of Family Centered Education lesson plans to school readiness

#### ***2. Develop relationships with others in the FCE community in order to offer support and encouragement***

- Describe the value of FCE to WIC parents, children, staff (including self) and agency
- Share expertise with others
- Develop a support network with others implementing the pilot
- Brainstorm solutions to common concerns related to teaching FCE classes

#### ***3. Develop skills to teach FCE classes in WIC***

- Learn and practice skills in two skill-building workshops selected from:
  - working with toddlers, preschoolers and their parents
  - reading to children
  - concepts and practices to facilitate adult learning
  - working with pre-literate or English-language learning adults
- Practice preparing and presenting one lesson plan to colleagues, and observe and provide feedback on the two others

#### ***4. Be prepared to participate in pilot test of WIC FCE***

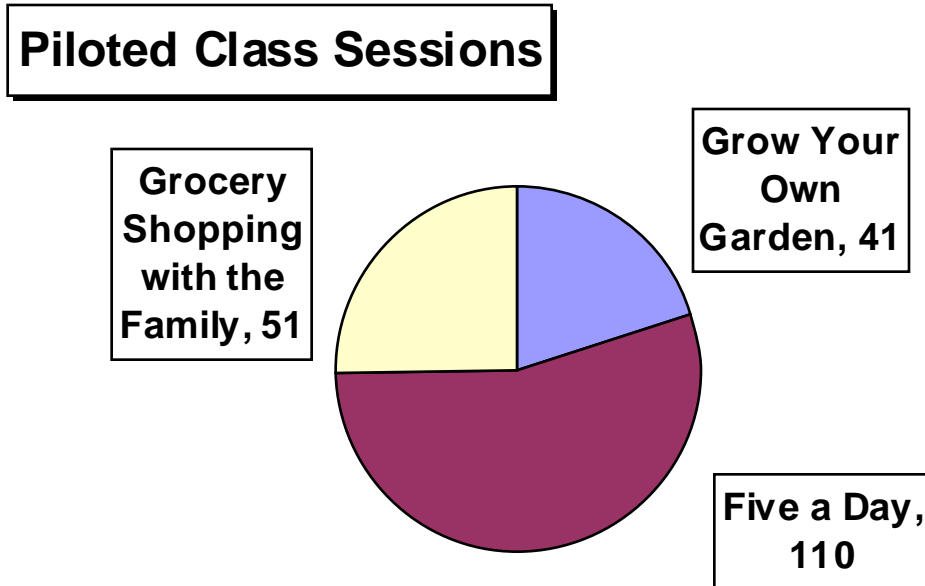
- Describe pilot design and develop agency-specific plan for testing out lesson plans (topic selection, preparation, participant scheduling, reporting, etc.)
- Describe the process for providing feedback from implementation

Staff members from the pilot agencies appreciated the training conference very much. Evaluations collected at the end of the two-day conference were extremely positive. Over the course of the pilot experience (July-September 2002), several staff members commented on the valuable experience they had had at the training conference. They recommended that the same type of training be offered to other staff offering FCE classes.

### D. Evaluation Design for the Pilot

We asked the eighteen pilot agencies to try to offer each of the three lesson topics at least two times over the summer. The information in this report is based on feedback provided from 202 class sessions.

- 41 class sessions of *Grow Your Own Garden* provided at 10 agencies
- 110 class sessions of *Five A Day* provided at 17 agencies
- 51 sessions of *Grocery Shopping with Families* provided at 11 agencies



#### The evaluation of the pilot had two major areas of focus:

1. **Participant** interest in family-centered education, both in general and in two specific areas:
  - The three pilot-tested FCE lessons
  - Other possible topics for FCE
2. **Staff** interest in FCE, both their belief in the value of this method of conducting group education, and their opinion/experience about the practicality of the method in use in their own agency

#### Evaluation methods included:

- Visits to six agencies to observe class presentations, and to learn about the system for implementing FCE
- Group and individual interviews on site with staff at six agencies
- Group and individual interviews with participants at six agencies
- Review of 1444 written evaluations completed by participants at 18 agencies
- Review of 133 written evaluations completed by staff at 16 agencies
- Conference calls, e-mail communication and informal feedback with staff at pilot agencies to assess needs, challenges, successes

**Our report draws from all of these sources of data.** This project is not a research study, but an active attempt to improve WIC services, in collaboration with participating agencies. With the large number of people involved, we knew there would be some inconsistencies in how lessons were taught and how data were collected. We learned a great deal about data collection, and we realize that we could improve our survey instruments. Please see notes in Appendix F for thoughts on ways to improve future data collection.

### **E. Current Status of WIC FCE**

There is overwhelming enthusiasm for the variety of changes in group education that have arisen from the implementation of FCE. Parents prefer the interactive style of teaching, and are happy that their children are involved in the classes. Many staff members also enjoy this different style of teaching, even though all of the aspects of FCE were not implemented all of the time. Local agencies have contributed to the development of the lesson plans by suggesting alternate materials and providing translations of handouts. Agencies are asking for more lesson plans to use in FCE sessions.

It is clear that FCE is a group education approach with considerable potential to improve California WIC services.



### ***III. WIC Families' Response to FCE***

Group education in WIC has received mixed reviews from both the participants and from the staff. Utilizing a family-centered approach might improve the group education experience, raising the value of this experience for WIC participants (parents) and their children. During the evaluation of the FCE pilot, we looked for information on families' responses to FCE from written surveys, class observations, and conversations with families at WIC sites.

**In this section of the report, we are interested in answering three basic questions:**

- A. How valuable did parents and children find the WIC class that they attended?
- B. What other topics would be valuable that might be addressed through FCE?
- C. Can WIC help parents teach their children – about nutrition or other topics leading to kindergarten readiness?

#### **A. How valuable did parents and children find the WIC class that they attended?**

##### **Usefulness to Children**

Children of all ages accompany their parents to WIC appointments. While some agencies have implemented child-centered activities and classes, these are not regular offerings. Some agencies have child-sized furniture or playthings in the waiting rooms, and some individual WIC staff people have books or toys for children who accompany their parents to individual education sessions. Generally, in group or individual education sessions, the children play or sit, and are noticed only when their activity disrupts the session.

Children in FCE, by contrast, are half of the focus. The lessons are directed towards them and their parents, and their involvement is encouraged. In some of the classes we observed, the session even became "child-centered," with the parents sitting in the background while the educator read to and interacted with the children.

Overall, children who were included in the FCE classes seemed to enjoy the experience. While some of them were shy about participating, most preschool or school-aged children (and some toddlers) eventually became engaged in the class activities. They put their hands in the mystery boxes, helped to place fruits and vegetables on the plates indicating the meal during which that food item might be served, talked about items in the shopping purse, and planted seeds in cups to take home. They happily received stickers to take home and paste on their *Five A Day* handouts. On a few occasions, we asked them directly, after class, if they had enjoyed themselves. They responded "Yes!"

Parents also responded that the classes were useful for their children. About 76% of those who brought children wrote that they found it very useful to the children.

In the *Grow Your Own Garden* class, 91% of participants who brought children considered it very useful for their children.

Participants who brought school-aged or preschool children were somewhat more enthused about the classes than those who brought toddlers or babies. Those who brought a preschooler or school-age child rated every one of the three classes as more useful to their child than did the parents who brought a baby or toddler.

### **Usefulness to Parents**

The majority of participants enjoyed the three FCE classes and felt that the classes were useful. Participant evaluations show that about 85% of attendees rated their class “very useful”. Well over 95% of participants (who responded) indicated they would both come to another WIC family class and also recommend it to other families.

It is interesting to note that parents' own evaluations of the class experience were affected by whether or not they had children present with them. Participants who brought children found their classes even more useful than those who did not; about 88% of participants who brought children found the class very useful for themselves, as compared to about 74% of participants who attended without bringing any children.

### **Enjoyment of Class**

Adults and children both learn better when they are enjoying the lesson. We designed these classes so that attendees would *want* to come to group education, rather than dread it. It is clear that participants greatly enjoyed the interactive nature of the class, regardless of the class topic. When we asked them what particular part of the class they enjoyed, their preferences differed depending on the class topic. Participants were asked to pick the *two most enjoyed elements* of the class (although some picked more than two), out of the following six class elements:

- Sharing ideas with other parents
- Information from the WIC group leader
- Reading a story
- Listening to music
- Family activity (in class)
- Gathering ideas for activities to do at home or store

In all the classes, about half the participants enjoyed the information they received from the educator, but (as shown in the chart on the next page) in the *Grow Your Own Garden* class the planting activity was a big favorite; in the *Grocery Shopping with the Family* class they especially appreciated gathering ideas they could try at home or in the store; and in the *Five A Day* class they liked sharing ideas with other parents.

Mostly because of its popularity among those who brought children, the *Grow Your Own Garden* class was especially highly rated overall. Among those who brought children, 98% rated it very useful.

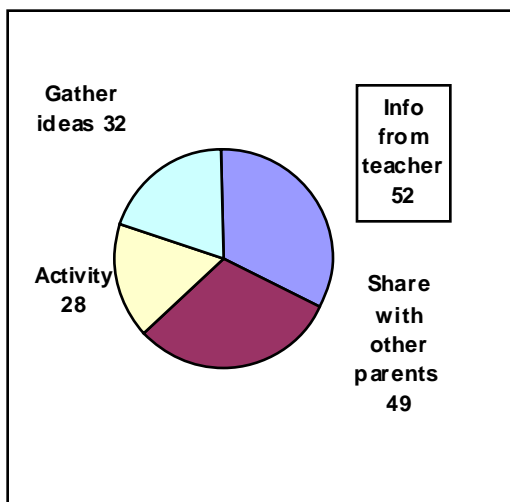
The favorite four elements for each class are shown in the following charts. Two elements, “reading a story” and “listening to music”, were chosen by only 10-15% of participants in every class, and are not shown.

## Four Most Enjoyed Elements in each Class — Compared

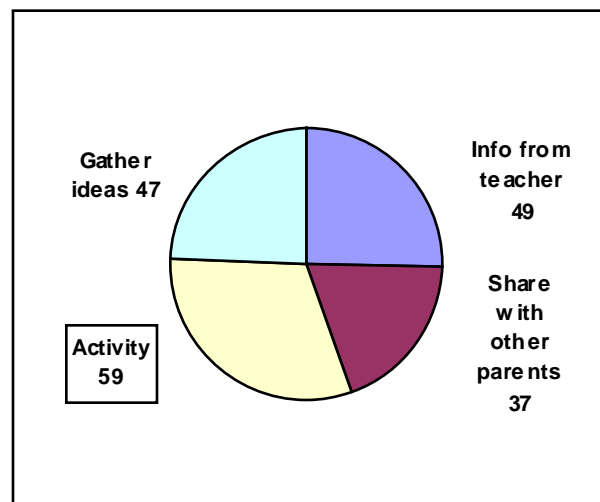
Showing % of participants choosing each one

**Box** indicates favorite element in each class

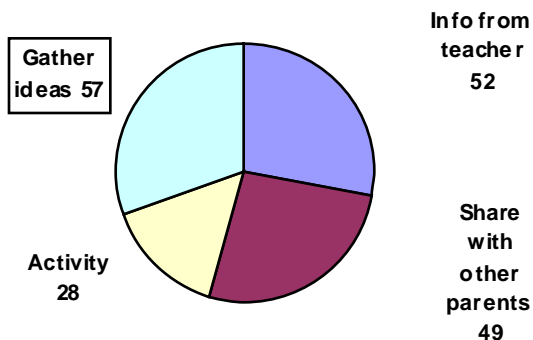
**Five a Day:**



**Grow Your Own Garden:**



**Grocery Shopping with Families:**



### What Parents Learned in the Classes

Across the three classes parents commented that they learned a lot, from how to prepare fruits and vegetables in a new way, to feeding the kids before going grocery shopping, to putting pebbles at the bottom of plants for drainage.



A few parents commented that what they learned related to WIC's involvement with children, that "WIC cares about the children's education," and that "WIC is doing more things for kids." One participant noted that she learned that "it is very positive for the nutritionist to work with the children and parents together in the WIC classes."

The modeling exemplified by the WIC group leaders led some parents to comment that they learned they need to take a more active role in their children's education, by singing more or reading to their children. Some participant comments from the survey:

- We should teach the little ones because they understand everything.
- I learned to teach my children to prepare [them] for school.

**In the *Five A Day* classes** parents said that they learned that people need five fruits and vegetables every day, that fruits and vegetables are important for health (for example, they help to lower blood pressure, prevent cancers, and promote regularity), and about the farmer's market. In addition, parents commented that they learned a lot about different ways to prepare fruits and vegetables by sharing recipes and preparation tips during the hands on activity. Many parents noted that they learned how to encourage their children to eat fruits and vegetables and that they should be persistent in their encouragement. One parent learned that her "son not eating his veggies may be just a phase – there's hope!"

**During the *Grocery Shopping with Families* classes** many parents learned how to make grocery shopping with children easier, by feeding the kids before going shopping, by making a shopping list and encouraging the children to make one too, by setting up simple rules before going to the store, by having the children help at the store and at home by putting away groceries, and by "bringing survival tools" like toys, books and activities for the children. Parents learned that trips to the store provide teachable moments during which they can teach their children about colors, numbers, textures, and words by pointing out fruits and vegetables in the store and talking about the price of food items. Comments included:

- You can take your kids shopping with you so they can learn.
- We learned about budgeting at the store.
- Making a list helps to reduce unnecessary purchases.
- Bringing a calculator to the store helps to keep track of how much we are spending.

There is always the possibility of learning occurring off the topic, but valuable nevertheless. The following comment illustrates that one parent was empowered by the information she learned in the class; she said that she learned "that we are WIC consumers and we have the right to be treated well in the store."

**The *Grow Your Own Garden* classes** taught parents how and when to plant vegetables and how to care for them. A number of participants commented that they learned to put pebbles under the soil for drainage, what containers to use and that they can use inexpensive containers they already have at home, and that they do not need a lot of space to grow plants. Parents also learned how to teach their children to plant vegetables.



Some participant comments:

- It is important for children's learning to grow a plant.
- I learned how essential gardening is to our nutrition.
- If you live in an apartment, you can still plant inside.
- Starting a garden with my child can be fun and not work. Reading and listening to music are ways of learning for my child, as well as for myself.
- I learned that working on a plant project provides sharing, quality time with my child.

### **What Parents Will Try at Home**

Many parents responded that they will try reading to their children at home. One pregnant, first-time mother noted, "I will read to my unborn baby – give her a head start." Another parent said, "I will spend more time with my child and read to him."

In the *Five A Day* classes, parents said they will try to teach their children at home by having children describe the size, shape, color, and texture of fruits and vegetables and by having them count the number of fruits and vegetables they see. One participant, inspired by the music played at the beginning of the *5 A Day* class, said, "I will try to dance with my baby ...and eat 5 a day."

*Five A Day* participants stated that they will try to eat more fruits and vegetables, wash fruits and vegetables before eating them, generally eat better (for example, less salt, less butter), and check nutrition information labels. Many parents mentioned they will try to teach their children about fruits and vegetables and encourage them to eat more. Some parents commented that they will try to model healthful eating for their children by having their children help them cook, "so when they grow up they'll eat healthy." One parent expressed the importance of modeling by stating she will "let my child try different fruits and vegetables, even though I don't care for them." Some other strategies parents had for encouraging fruit and vegetable consumption:

- Use the handout "Today, I Ate These Fruits and Vegetables" to chart the number of fruits and vegetables their child eats in a day
- Be more creative with the preparation of fruits and vegetables (for example, put smiley faces on the fruits and vegetables, arrange them in fun ways, etc.)
- Try the new recipes learned in the class
- Try preparing new fruits and vegetables
- Add vegetables to different foods (for example, with meats, in smoothies, etc.)
- Play the "Mystery Box" game with children

Parents who attended the *Grocery Shopping with Families* classes wrote that they will try the strategies presented in class for making shopping easier by:

- feeding children before going shopping/taking snacks to the store for the children
- making a shopping list
- having children make a shopping list
- making grocery shopping a time for learning (for example, teach children to use calculators, talk to them about what they see in the store, etc)

Several parents in the *Grocery Shopping* classes also indicated that they:

- were motivated by the class and will now try taking their children shopping
- will try to be more economical in their shopping

The *Grow Your Own Garden* classes inspired parents to start a garden and work with their children by teaching them to plant fruits and vegetables.

### **What Participants Liked Best**

One of the most common comments regarding what parents liked best about the classes was that the classes were different from the WIC classes they had attended in the past. Parents enjoyed the participatory nature of the classes and the opportunity to share ideas and information with other parents. Some participant comments:

**“It was more interesting. Sitting to watch a video, it’s easy to zone out”**

- It was something new today.
- Thank the state for thinking about the entire family and children for a program that’s for women, infants, and children.
- It was improved; more involvement with the WIC staff (we got to know their names).
- It was personable.
- It wasn’t so dull.
- It was more interesting. Sitting to watch a video, it’s easy to zone out.
- We didn’t have to watch boring old videos.
- The group leaders talked more instead of just playing a movie.
- I liked that we were taught that we can share and have opinions.
- I liked parents commenting and sharing.
- I liked learning how we as moms really care for our children in the same way.

Parents also enjoyed the opportunity to spend time with their children and watch their children learn and play, through the story time and the hands on activities, like the “Mystery Box.” Some other participant comments:

**“I liked doing activities with my children. It makes them feel important”**

- What I liked best was the new system to have class with my children.
- I liked seeing the kids interact with the instructor and they were interested in what she was saying because she made it fun.
- I liked that the class was a good learning source for children.
- I liked that class was child-oriented. I brought my three year old without chaos.
- I liked doing activities with my children. It makes them feel important.
- I liked how much my child enjoyed the activities and how she participated in class.
- I liked that the leaders gave the children stickers and asked them questions.
- I liked the end when my daughter got her book and sticker. She was very happy.
- My son got to enjoy the company of other kids and I love that.

Other participants noted that they liked the clear and concise nature of the classes, that the classes were “very understandable and practical,” “very simple and informative,” not “too long,” and “short, interesting, and to the point.”

Other common likes included the group leaders (for example, they were good teachers, patient, nice, etc.) and the information they provided, both in class and in the form of handouts and brochures. Parents liked the explanations provided by the group leaders about how to work with and teach their children. As one parent stated, “I like the way they told us how to communicate with our kids.” Most participants answered the question “What can we change to make this WIC class better?” by stating that they enjoyed the switch to FCE and that WIC should “give more classes like [these],” “offer the same class, not just watch a video and go home,” and “do this [FCE] for all the classes.” Specifically participants enjoyed the “interaction involving parents and children” and liked the opportunity for children to interact with each other.

These comments illustrate the achievement of the WIC FCE Goals for parents as outlined on page 4:

- Increase knowledge and skill related to child and family nutrition
- Have a positive experience learning with their children
- Learn how parents can be their children's first teacher

### **Suggested Changes**

Most respondents (about 80%) said that there were no changes needed in the classes.

**Increased Participation**-The major change requested by participants is to have increased participation from the parents and children and to have more participants in the classes. Parents enjoyed hearing each other’s ideas and learning from them. They want more people to attend the classes and want the class leaders to encourage participation among those in attendance.

**Bring Children**-The second most common suggestion for changing the classes is that parents want to know ahead of time to bring their children. Some participant comments from the survey:

- If I had brought my kids it would have been more fun for me.
- Have more children because they help with the activities and make the class less difficult for the rest of us.
- I didn’t know class was going to be like this, so I left one of my kids watching the other in the playroom.

**“I didn’t know class was going to be like this, so I left one of my kids watching the other in the playroom.”**

Although some of the pilot sites called participants ahead of time to request that they bring their children, this practice was not consistent among sites.

**Provide More Information-** The third most common suggestion is to provide more information (for example, on nutrition, health, food/recipes, and parenting) to take home in the form of pamphlets, booklets, and handouts.

**Logistics-** A few participants made suggestions regarding the logistics of the classes. Although these comments were not among the most common, they are valuable tenets of training and may help group leaders provide better classes. One participant noted that “seating needs to be in a circle so everyone can participate more.” Sitting in a U-shape or circle was not consistent among the pilot sites, but this arrangement is likely to encourage the participation that parents want and enjoy. A second suggestion is to “start on time. Latecomers must reschedule.” Both participants and group leaders noted that participants came in late and that this practice was distracting to the class process.

## **B. What other topics might be addressed through FCE?**

We did not receive much response in our quest for suggestions for other topics to offer as FCE group education sessions. Generally, the participants seemed grateful for WIC services, and willing to participate in sessions about a wide range of relevant topics. They enjoyed (as noted above) the interactive style of the classes. A few participants, who have been receiving WIC services for many years, did not think that there would be any new topics worth addressing. When prompted, there were suggestions that the following topics might be useful:

- nutrition/ things to eat and not to eat
- shopping
- teeth – dental health
- using bottles and cups with infants/toddlers
- educational programs – ABC's
- discipline
- art
- recipes – preparing food that's easy with children
- junk food
- safety
- ways to prepare veggies so that kids will eat them
- numbers
- reading labels



### **C. Can WIC help parents teach their children – about nutrition or other topics leading to kindergarten readiness?**

One of the goals of the WIC FCE initiative is to help parents prepare their children for learning in school (sometimes called kindergarten readiness). There is a concern that WIC families do not read to their children at home. There is widespread evidence<sup>3</sup> that children who are read to at home will be better prepared for kindergarten – and the ongoing school experience. This "readiness" or "preparedness" does not only include specific reading skills, but also involves all of the social and emotional skills that children need in order to succeed at school.

The California WIC program would like to understand what kinds of preparation parents are providing to their children, and also whether the parents would appreciate receiving assistance in the area of kindergarten preparation from WIC.

During site visits to six WIC agencies, we tried to assess the type of preparation that WIC parents provide for their children. It was difficult to gain information. Educators sometimes asked, before they read the story for the class, how many families read together at home. They also asked children if they enjoyed it when their parents read to them. Families (parents and children) gave generally positive responses. However, there were many parents who did not respond. It is possible that those parents and children who *do* read together were much more vociferous in their response than those who do not.

When asked where they received information on parenting, most parents listed a variety of sources: their own parents, neighbors and friends, magazines, doctors, television. They did not express a strong need for further parenting education provided by WIC, although they expressed general receptiveness to the idea that such information or support might be made available.



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<sup>3</sup> Richard C. Anderson, E.H. Hiebert, J.A. Scott, and I.A.G. Wilkinson. *Becoming a nation of readers: the report of the Commission on Reading*. National Academy of Education, 1985 (also, National Council Of Teachers Of English, 1986).

## ***IV. Staff Responses to FCE***

In evaluating the FCE pilot, we recognize the critical importance of staff attitudes toward both the concept of FCE and the actual practice of FCE within their local agency. We wanted to know whether staff believed that this method of conducting group education was valuable, and whether it was practical to implement.

### **Our evaluation of staff response asked the following questions:**

- A. Was this FCE model a good way to teach parents about nutrition and parenting?
- B. Was this FCE model a good way to teach children?
- C. Did this work well in your local agency?

Staff members communicated with us via their Educator Evaluation forms (see Appendix B), on conference calls, via e-mail or faxed-in comments, and in conversations at the six WIC sites we visited.

From the outset, we recognized that teaching classes is often not a popular task for WIC staff. Staff members have told us over the years that they do not like to teach, that participants do not like to come to classes, and that scheduled classes are sometimes not taught because it gets busy in the clinic, room is not available, or staff are not available. One agency has different levels for nutrition assistant staff, and the higher level provides individual education to participants, while the lower level teaches classes. We discovered that the practice of showing a video for a class is very prevalent, and many participants expressed their dissatisfaction with video “classes.” One staff member told us that when the agency schedules participants for their appointments, they do not tell the participants that they will be attending a class at the next appointment, because “then they won’t come.”

The WIC community has concerns over group education, and individual agencies – as well as the state as a whole – have tried to improve the situation. The California WIC program has explored Facilitated Group Discussion (FGD) as a method for group education, as well as the Global Learning Partners (GLP) approach. While these methods are appreciated by many staff, others have expressed confusion over them. The basic concept of “learner-centered” education has not yet been clearly communicated to all staff members, as shown by a number of questions we received.

### **A. Was this FCE model a good way to teach parents about nutrition and parenting?**

FCE offered a welcome change for those staff who taught it. When asked what surprised them about teaching with the FCE approach, a few comments were very illustrative:

***“Participants seemed to be actually enjoying these classes.”***

“I was surprised that...”

- some people do participate in and enjoy the class.
- parents weren’t bored when I read a storybook to them.

- participants seemed to be actually *enjoying* these classes.
- the Hispanic women were so attentive and eagerly participated in classes.
- men participated.
- the paraprofessional staff was so positive about presenting/facilitating these classes. Previously we had received comments that they were uncomfortable...they enjoyed involving the children.

Staff, many of whom are accustomed to participants not liking classes, were happily surprised at the positive feedback from these classes. For example, they commented that most of the participants were interested in teaching their children, and appreciated the inclusion of their children in the classes. During our conference calls, we heard many comments about the interactive style of the class, and the surprising participation of those attending. By engaging in conversation with the participants, staff learned more about the knowledge and attitudes of WIC parents. When we visited sites and talked with staff, the large majority of those who piloted the classes agreed that this is a good way for parents to learn.

Several staff members reported that the FCE classes were different in that both educator and participants *were* interested and engaged. On several different occasions while observing WIC sites, we noticed that participants came forward in the classroom, participated, and stayed after the class was concluded in order to continue conversing about the subject.

Staff were asked to rate the value to families of the lesson content (topic) and of each class component. The components shown below were listed – a list similar to the one on the participant evaluation – but staff were not asked to choose favorites; they were allowed to rate each component on a scale from “not valuable” to “very valuable”

**Ratings (adapted from *Educator Evaluation form*)**

**Please rate the following elements of the WIC Family Centered Education sessions, telling us how valuable you think each part was for the families in your group.**

	1* Not Valuable	2* Slightly Valuable	3* Somewhat Valuable	4* Valuable	5* Very Valuable
Lesson topic or content	4.5 average rating				
Activities:					
• Music	3.7 average rating				
• Warm-up activity (except Grocery Shopping lesson)	4.5 average rating				
• Book sharing	4.1 average rating				
• Discussion or demonstration	4.5 average rating				
• Hands-on activity	4.6 average rating				
• Take-home materials	4.1 average rating				

\*Note: The rating scale on the evaluation form was not numbered; numbers were assigned to each rating category when the data from the evaluations was entered.



In each of the three classes, music was seen as the least valuable element, although it was rated between 3 (somewhat valuable) and 4 (valuable).

The other class elements and the lesson content (topic) were rated between 4 (valuable) and 5 (very valuable) for each class.

Compared to staff who taught the other two classes, those who tested *Grow Your Own Garden* rated the value of its elements as slightly higher to participants.

We compared the responses of the staff regarding the value of the classes to the responses of the WIC participants. There was considerable agreement that the interactive nature of the classes – exemplified by the discussion and hands-on activity – was very valuable. When there is this kind of agreement, it is a good indication that both staff and families will have a positive experience in the class. All responses point in the positive direction.

### **B. Was this FCE model a good way to teach children?**

Early in our process of piloting, some staff members had questioned the need for teaching children, or the practicality of teaching them in group education. Most, however, were enthusiastic about helping WIC families to be healthier and more successful. This help, in their opinion, went beyond dispensing food vouchers and giving information on nutrition, weight gain and food choices. The majority of staff seemed to truly enjoy interacting with the children in class, in reading the book and in engaging the kids in the hands-on activity. Some staff saw the family-centered approach as the most practical – since families come to their WIC appointments together, why not include all ages?

While these FCE classes were written specifically to address parents and their children of preschool age, the actual child class participants included all ages. Staff commented many times that FCE classes worked much better when the actual audience closely matched the target audience. If the classes were taught to a roomful of adults only, or adults with babies, many staff considered it more difficult. They thought (as the data from parents also suggests) that the children who benefited most were those for whom the classes were designed.

### **C. Did this work well in your local agency?**

The eighteen different agencies that participated in the FCE Pilot are representative of the diversity of the WIC agencies in the state. However, the staff who piloted the FCE lesson plans tended to be a fairly experienced group.

We asked the staff members (educators) to tell us how much experience they had in leading group education sessions. Of the 50 staff who responded:

- 34 stated that they do group ed regularly
- 7 stated that they do group ed occasionally
- 7 stated that they are new to group ed
- 29 told us that they regularly lead classes with parents and children together.



Because our pilot educators had experience with group education, and often with teaching children and parents together, we might expect them to have more positive experiences with these classes than those who were new to teaching. Overall, staff were enthusiastic about the FCE model. During our conference calls and site visits, educators and coordinators from pilot agencies stated that they planned to continue and expand the offerings in their agencies.

The interactive style of the classes, however, posed a challenge to staff who prefer providing information in a lecture-

style format, or through use of a video. Parents, as noted in Section III, were overwhelmingly enthusiastic about this interactive

format. Staff found that it took more time, and they could not control the discussion completely. The following comment is representative of the concern of a number of staff members: “I think our biggest obstacle is breaking out of the old habit of lecture-style presentations, that are a large part of our comfort zone.”

**“I think our biggest obstacle is breaking out of the old habit of lecture-style presentations, that are a large part of our comfort zone.”**

The three different lessons required different set-up and time, and were evaluated differently by staff. Using a scale from 1 to 5, staff were also asked to rate the ease of preparing for each lesson (including the clarity of the prep guidelines, and gathering materials), the lesson plan format (instructions), and length of each lesson.

Each of these logistical elements was generally rated as good (about 4 on the scale):

**Ratings (adapted from *Educator Evaluation form*)**

	1* Poor	2* Fair	3* Good	4* Very Good	5* Excellent
How did this lesson plan format (instructions) work for you?	4.55 average rating				
Were the materials easy to gather and preparation guidelines easy to follow?	4.1 average rating				
How was the length of the lesson for your groups?	4.0 average rating				

\*Note: The rating scale on the evaluation form was not numbered; numbers were assigned to each rating category when the data from the evaluations was entered.

Each of these logistical elements was generally rated as good:

In each class, the lesson plan format was rated slightly more favorably than the ease of preparation, and the length of the lessons was rated as slightly more problematic than the other logistical elements.

**Five A Day** was the most frequently taught class during the pilot. Of the 50 staff who responded, 36 taught this class. It is closely aligned with the WIC goals in nutrition education, lends itself to a more traditional (information-giving) type of instruction, and is a familiar topic.

Staff commented that using fresh fruits and vegetables in the class was very positive for the class experience, but required extra shopping and set-up. The value to the families of the take home materials for this class were rated by staff as slightly less than 4 (valuable).

**Grocery Shopping with Families** was the second most frequently taught class. Of the 50 staff who responded, 20 taught this class. As with *Five A Day*, the content is familiar to WIC staff. Parents have asked for this topic to be taught.



This class was challenging because there were a number of materials to collect for the shopping purse, and the “make-and-take” activity for children’s books proved difficult for agencies – we do not know if any agencies actually carried out that activity.

**Grow Your Own Garden** was the class taught the least often. Many staff members expressed concerns about the lesson during the pre-pilot training. They were particularly concerned about the mess generated by dirt and spoons and cups in children’s hands. Those with concerns appear to have self-selected out of piloting this lesson. Of the 50 staff who responded, only 17 taught this class. However, the pilots reported that the class was fun to teach, and participants liked it very much.

These pilot educators were slightly more satisfied with the length, materials, prep guidelines and lesson plan format of the lesson than were the pilot educators of the other two lessons.

See Section V for further information on administration of FCE classes.

## ***V. Administration and Logistics***

The agencies who participated in the FCE pilot were volunteers. Therefore, they are perhaps more likely to find administration of FCE classes workable than those agencies who did not volunteer. We recognize that implementing FCE as a style of group education requires some changes on the part of individual staff, WIC participants and WIC agencies. The successful staff member will embrace the FCE concept, be comfortable with an interactive teaching style, want to teach parents and children together, and be able to organize supplies. Teaching FCE classes, without question, requires more effort than putting on a video for WIC participants to watch.

Beyond staff qualifications, there are five areas that bear mentioning as we consider implementation of FCE in all WIC agencies statewide.

- Philosophy about group education
- Supervisor support
- Scheduling families
- Space and time for the classes
- Materials



### **A. Philosophy about group education**

WIC regulations require two nutrition education contacts for each participant within each certification period. Agencies could provide individual education to participants at each visit, but many agencies – especially the medium to large sized ones – elect to offer group education at least some of the time. When we questioned staff as to why they offered group ed, the universal answer was “time.” It is more time-efficient to teach a group than to teach ten individuals. However, when time-saving is the primary motivating factor for offering a service, the service is at risk of being brief and perfunctory. This is certainly the case with the video-classes.

The interactive, or learner-centered, models of group education are implemented because administrators see a benefit in the interaction of a group of participants. It is assumed that the members of the group have something to offer each other. The first step in an interactive education session is to have the group introduce themselves to each other. This is not usually done in WIC classes, but was done in most FCE classes. One piloting staff person said that she noticed a positive difference in the atmosphere of the class – compared to non-FCE classes – immediately after the introductions were done.

Being willing to take the time for introductions, and to allow the group to participate in the direction that the discussion goes, is new and challenging for many WIC staff people. When including children as active participants of the class, there are many more directions that a discussion can take. Philosophically, agencies and staff people will need to agree to this different model if they wish to implement FCE.

WIC agencies have had little motivation to change their group education practices in the past. Surveys of participants did not raise complaints. The FCE pilot experience has raised considerable evidence that staff and participants recognize that the current model of group education is not satisfactory. They have expressed their pleasure at participating in something different.

## **B. Supervisor support**

Supervisor support is an essential element to making FCE classes work. The classes require preparation time to review the lesson plans and gather materials. At one site visit, a staff member told us that she did not find out she was going to teach the class until that morning and that she had not reviewed the lesson plan for that class since she attended the FCE training conference several months earlier. She also mentioned that her supervisor did not provide time for her to go to the store to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables before conducting the *Five A Day* classes. At another site visit, one staff member who was not doing FCE mentioned that teaching the classes would be burdensome because of scheduling. She said she hardly had time to go to the bathroom during her busy day.

In addition to the provision of time for preparation, supervisors need to provide opportunities for staff members to practice the lesson plans with each other, either at staff meetings or inservice trainings of trainers.

## **C. Scheduling Families**

One of the first concerns raised was about the implementation of FCE in local agencies was scheduling. Agencies schedule participants for appointments based on fairly rigid protocols. None of the pilot agencies scheduled families with preschool children for a specific time slot in the agency's calendar. Agencies may have a few or many different classes that they teach, rotating them according to a system that they devise. A few classes, such as breastfeeding, are for specific categories of participants. Many are not. The result of this scheduling system is that a class on any given day will have participants without children or with children of different ages. We have already noted that FCE classes are designed for – and according to staff and participants, work better with – parents and preschool-aged children.

Compounding the difficulty of trying to schedule participants into specific classes – FCE or others – is the habit of WIC participants to miss their appointments. In conversations with a number of different staff people, we found that the no-show or show-at-other-time rate in WIC clinics can be around 50% on any day. Since participants who come to an appointment may belong to any category but need a nutrition education contact, they are usually placed in whatever class happens to be offered at the time they come to the clinic. Most participants want to receive their services quickly. By offering very general classes, agencies can fit the participant into a class slot without making her wait until a class appropriate to her stage of pregnancy or parenting is offered. The downside of this approach is that “one-size-fits-all” usually does not fit anyone very well. Therefore, one of the prime goals of adult learning – that the learning be relevant to the adult right now – is not met.

We had conversations with staff about how to schedule participants so that the FCE classes would mostly be composed of parents with preschool-aged children. There are several different possibilities listed below, some of which were tried at piloting agencies:

- Create a special code for FCE classes in ISIS. Offer families with preschool-aged children a specific class. If they know that this class will be interesting and fun, they might keep the appointment.

- Select a time for FCE classes. Schedule as many families as possible into that class. Provide a reminder postcard or phone call. If a participant who does not have preschool children comes to the clinic at that time (without an appointment), offer her individual education instead.
- Have FCE classes prepped and ready to offer when the opportunity arises. Recruit families who are appropriate from the waiting room.

#### **D. Space and Time for the Classes**

Most of the pilot agencies had sufficient space to offer FCE classes. They had separate classrooms and sufficient tables and chairs. Most of the classes were very small (5-6 adults with 5-10 children would be large). The layout of chairs and tables might not have been ideal for an interactive class with children and parents, but rearrangements could be easily made.

We recognize that there is an enormous variety of WIC sites throughout the state. Some spaces are very small, some are crowded, and some have other shortcomings. The larger pilot agencies mostly chose to offer the FCE pilot at one or two of their sites. They chose those that most easily accommodate the FCE style of teaching. Other sites – and other agencies in the state – might not be able to offer these classes without making changes to their clinic layout.

Time was certainly an issue for the pilot agencies. When introduced to the FCE classes, many staff people expressed concern that these classes lasted longer than 15 minutes. A few agencies already schedule longer classes, but those are the minority. We did not explore in depth why short classes are the norm, but we have two general impressions. First, classes are not considered a very valuable WIC benefit. Therefore, participants prefer short classes – a class is often simply a way of using up time while waiting for vouchers to be issued.

Second, WIC agencies serve a large number of participants with limited staff, so agencies may schedule classes to be brief so as to free up staff time for other duties. When there is a busy time in the clinic, staff work to move participants through the system. If each participant is in the clinic a shorter amount of time, there is more room for others.

After being involved in the pilot, staff seemed to have mixed opinions about the length of the FCE classes. While they feel the pressures of providing services to a large number of participants in a limited amount of time, they see the benefit of allowing a longer class time if the class experience is a good one for both staff and participants.

#### **E. Materials**

All of the FCE classes required more materials than the usual WIC class. Each class included hands-on activities, as appropriate to the preschool-aged child. Staff members mentioned the difficulties of assembling all of the materials and having them in order for each class.

Since good education of preschoolers includes hands-on activities, materials will continue to be a part of any FCE approach.

## ***VI. Recommendations for Next Steps***

There is a great deal of enthusiasm for Family Centered Education in WIC. Twenty-one local agencies have been involved in field-testing or pilot-testing the three lesson plans. Implementing FCE has meant that staff needed to reassess their teaching methods, the physical layout for their classes, the time that they give to group education, the materials that they use – and more. Despite logistical challenges, the great majority of those who have experienced FCE believe that it should be expanded. At one site staff members are working on three new lesson plans, modeled after the FCE classes: Fun Family Meals, Feeding With Fun and Good Sense and Parenting.

Based on the experience of the past two years, the following are recommended next steps toward implementing FCE throughout California WIC.

### **A. Revise Lesson Plans and Disseminate throughout the State**

Based on feedback from staff and participants, we are revising the current three lesson plans. The state needs a dissemination method to allow all WIC agencies to access these lesson plans.

In addition to the current lesson plans being disseminated throughout the state, new FCE lesson plans that are in the works could be tested and taught at WIC sites in California.

### **B. Train Staff**

The first step in implementing the pilot of FCE was to hold a training conference for staff. FCE is not a complex concept, but it does require thinking and acting in different ways than WIC educators have in the past.

Lesson plans are valuable, but they may not be utilized in the best way by untrained staff. It is essential that the staff understand the general theoretical reasoning behind the lesson plans, and specifically why elements are included (for example, the book sharing, music, etc).

Many staff who conducted FCE sessions recommended a training of trainers (TOT) as the best way to implement the FCE lesson plans across the State. This TOT would need to be carefully designed, to assure that the messages learned by the attendees were not lost in their subsequent training of others. Staff who attended the FCE training conference largely understood the theory behind the various elements in the lesson plans. But staff who were trained to do the lesson plans by conference attendees did not universally have a grasp of the child development issues and conceptual framework of the classes.

Practice is as important as theory, and the training conference attendees commented on the value of the actual practice in presenting the lessons. The practice component should be included in any training for the rest of the state.



### **C. Learn More about WIC Families**

During the evaluation of this pilot, we attempted to gather information from parents about the activities they do with their children to prepare them for school. We also attempted to learn what sources parents use to find information on parenting. As mentioned earlier (see section IV), it was difficult to gain this type of information. Future research needs to be done to understand what parents are doing at home to help their children learn and prepare them for school, and where they receive information about parenting.

We were not able to identify specific ways that parents would like WIC to support them, beyond the obvious nutrition supplementation. Focus groups with parents – at times when they are not in a hurry – could help to identify their feelings about WIC as a source of parenting information. Focus groups could also identify specific areas where WIC parents need more support, as could conversations with WIC staff who hear of needs from parents during individual education sessions.

It is clear that there is great diversity among WIC families. When we questioned parents in classes and focus groups, some told us that they do read to their children at home, and color with them, and play games. But other parents sat quietly nearby, neither agreeing nor disagreeing; possibly they did not feel free to admit that they do not spend much time doing such activities with their children. WIC efforts to promote nutrition and to assist families in kindergarten-preparedness may need to be differentiated and targeted to reach all these families.

### **D. Expand FCE beyond Group Education**

Applying the concept of FCE to individual education sessions would greatly improve the client-centeredness of these sessions and create opportunities for modeling parenting skills. As we observed, the individual education sessions are largely parent-centered, with little to no attention paid to children. In individual sessions parents and children could be asked questions about nutrition, reading, television watching, and activities and games they do at home. Many of the ideas presented in the lesson plans could be adapted to the individual counseling sessions.

### **E. Make Room for FCE in the WIC System**

WIC has a long history as a program which provides vouchers for supplemental food. Over the years, more emphasis has been placed on education and referrals. However, it is our observation that both staff and participants prioritize the receipt of vouchers as the main reason for a WIC visit. There is significant time spent on checking eligibility and recording documentation.

WIC may need to allow more time for each encounter, or to change the way that participants are scheduled. FCE classes take 30 minutes or more, and participants who are engaged in the discussion might linger. In order to achieve the desirable number of participants in a class (approximately 15-20 including both adults and preschool-aged children), it will be necessary to schedule the classes for specific time slots and groups of participants. The current WIC practice of serving participants when they arrive – regardless of their appointment time – works against the goal of assembling a group that includes only or primarily families with young children. When participants in mixed categories are in attendance, it becomes much more difficult to tailor the teaching to the group – the group has too many different needs and interests.

## **F. Build a Community of FCE Practitioners**

Approximately twenty of the eighty-three California WIC agencies have participated in the field and pilot testing of FCE. Only a few of the staff from most agencies were involved. Therefore, the practitioners of WIC FCE are a small number among the thousands of WIC staff. Since FCE takes a bit more effort, and a different approach to group education, than is usual in WIC, these staff members will need support for their efforts. Over the past year, they have met at a training conference, been involved in conference calls, and have received monthly newsletters. These interactions have given them information about FCE and how it is implemented in local agencies, and have allowed them to share successes and challenges. In any new endeavor, it is important to support the innovators.

## **G. Collaborate with Other Community Agencies**

WIC's mission has not always included early childhood education; nor has it included supporting families as the primary teachers of their children. The FCE experience shows that WIC has a valuable contribution to make in these areas. However, WIC will be most successful if it does not work alone.

Each of the communities that WIC serves also is home to other agencies with complementary missions, and with different expertise. Libraries, for example, might offer support in developing early literacy – to WIC. WIC, on the other hand, might offer nutritional information that libraries want to include in displays or programs. Head Start is a most likely collaborator, since it specifically serves preschool children and their families. Head Start has a stated goal of health promotion, and strong interest in childhood health and nutrition. WIC agencies should seek out partnerships that will maximize their capability to provide family-centered education.





## *Appendices*

- A. Participant Evaluation Forms (for each of 3 lessons)
- B. Educator Evaluation Form
- C. Participant Focus Group Questions
- D. Staff Focus Group Questions
- E. Staff Feedback Form
- F. Notes about Evaluation and Data Issues